

August 26, 1985

Dr. Harold E. Varmus  
American Cancer Society  
Professor of Molecular Virology  
University of California School of Medicine  
HSE401  
San Francisco, CA 94143

Dear Harold:

I think that the AIDS virus should be named the "human AIDS retrovirus" (HARV).

I have been telling patients since the spring of 1984 that we feel that they have been infected with the AIDS retrovirus and since the spring of this year we have been able to confirm that impression with the HTLV-III/LAV antibody test. Patients are understandably distraught when given this information but it is essential that they know the nature of their infection so that they can avoid transmitting the disease to others and they can make appropriate life plans based on current perceptions of how this infection may effect their survival. If you name the virus something else, clinicians will be forced to tell the patient that they have "XYZ" virus which is the new name for the human AIDS retrovirus.

I agree with your Subcommittee that the term "AIDS" is particularly frightening in current society but the reality is that this is indeed a frightening epidemic. Fear is best conquered by knowledge, not ignorance, and to change the name of the virus in an effort to allay public anxieties does not serve the public good and will simply confuse matters more.

I hope these thoughts help and I do not envy you the difficult social and political task you face.

Sincerely yours,



Marcus A. Conant  
Professor of Dermatology

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